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ABSTRACT

The Wayne State College Lifestyle Improvement Program for Seniors, based on the wellness concept, is designed to facilitate social interaction and health through physical activities. It is adaptable to a variety of individual needs and preferences, including exercises for cardiac rehabilitation patients. Any person over 50 can participate at no expense other than that of a physical examination. Most participants are retired individuals in the community. Participants are encouraged to investigate physical activities they enjoy, with the only requirement being that all participate in balance and flexibility exercises daily, which promotes physical well-being, confidence, and motivation. Periodically, mini-lectures are given on topics such as osteoporosis, nutrition, and target heart rate. Each participant is encouraged to work at his own level, based on target heart rate. Program goals include: (1) lifestyle improvement for community members over 50; (2) research on lifestyle improvement activities; (3) provision of continuing education and training programs for wellness teachers; (4) provision of testing and prescription in such areas as body composition, pulmonary function, cardiac risk, cardiovascular evaluation, nutrition, and flexibility; and (5) provision of a regime of progressive activity and exercise for those recovering from strokes and heart attacks. (MSE)

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LIFETSYLE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM FOR SENIORS

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AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory is a two-year project seeking to establish and test a model system for collecting and disseminating information on model programs at AASCU-member institutions--375 of the public four-year colleges and universities in the United States.

The four objectives of the project are:

- To increase the information on model programs available to all institutions through the ERIC system
- To encourage the use of the ERIC system by AASCU institutions
- To improve AASCU's ability to know about, and share information on, activities at member institutions, and
- To test a model for collaboration with ERIC that other national organizations might adopt.

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project is funded with a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, in collaboration with the ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education at The George Washington University.

ABSTRACT

The Wayne State College Lifestyle Improvement Program for Seniors is designed to facilitate social interaction and health through the use of the wellness concept. The program is adaptable to a variety of individual needs and preferences, including exercises for cardiac rehabilitation patients. An emphasis on the social aspect provides for a more enjoyable class atmosphere, motivation for the participants, and an altering of attitudes toward physical activity, encouraging long term compliance. Other objectives of the program include wellness instructor preparation and research on the aging . There is no fee for the program.

Age is a quality of body and mind;
If you lift your own dreams and hopes for mankind,
If you possess the zest for life in peace or strife,
If your flames of movement and enthusiasm are alive - not dead;
Then you are not old, but young instead.

INTRODUCTION

The aging process is irreversible. Organ and tissue changes occur gradually and at different rates in each individual. The rates of biological and psychosocial change are determined by the interaction of genetic and environmental forces.

Wellness is a dynamic process which can be used to slow the aging process. It is a conscious and deliberate attempt to enhance physical and psychosocial health. The wellness process consists of more than just being physically fit. It also incorporates dimensions of nutritional awareness, stress management, intellectual and social awareness.

It is important for an aging individual to be knowledgable about food and nutrition and the effects of drug, alcohol and tobacco use. Along with this, individuals need to be informed on the importance of cardiovascular fitness and how to improve this through regular exercise. Stress management encourages a positive approach to identifying and the sources of stress and learning to cope with them. An intellectual awareness encourages the use of resources available to expand on personal

knowledge. Along with these aspects, the social dimension of wellness encourages a contribution to the human and physical environment to develop the community as a whole as well as the individual.

A healthy lifestyle that utilizes this holistic approach affects one's self-image. This self-image can be affected and improved through the wellness approach, incorporating the above mentioned dimensions. The wellness concept is the basis for the Wayne State Senior Lifestyle Improvemnt Program for Seniors.

BACKGROUND

Realizing a need for a cautious and deliberate approach to an improved pattern of physical, psychological and nutritional health in the elderly, a wellness program was developed by the Health, Physical Education and Recreation Division of Wayne State College to alleviate this need in the community of Wayne, Nebraska. The program, initiated in the fall of 1984, began with only 6 or 7 participants. But within a month, the number grew to 67. By the fall of 1985 the program had 74 participants. Currently, the program has 124 participants which remains consistant.

DESCRIPTION

Any person over age 50 can participate at no expense, other than the cost of a required physcial exam. The majority

of the participants are retired individuals from the community. Those with more severe problems, such as stroke or heart attack victims, are also welcome. Unlike traditional fitness programs for the elderly, the emphasis is on a positive and fun approach with physical fitness being the outcome rather than the initial goal. Since wellness is more than just being physically fit, program developers need to organize a program that is balanced in the dimensions of stress management, social interaction, nutritioanl awareness, health education, physical fitness and flexibility. The program, designed to facilitate social interaction through recreational and fitness activities, includes activities such as:

- flexibility work
- jogging and walking
- acquacizing
- social games
- aerobics
- swimming
- balance work
- dance
- mini lectures
- weight training

Participants are encourged to investigate areas they enjoy the most. The only requirement made of everyone is that they participate in balance and flexibility activities each day. This is important for two reasons. The participants are generally inflexible due to lack of movement and arthritis. The flexibility work improves their range of motion which allows them to do the other activities successfully. It is also an area which demonstrates rapid improvement. This in turns gives them the confidence and motivation to continue.

Periodically, mini-lectures are given on such topics as osteoporosis, nutrition, and target heart rate. The mini-lectures are brief but informative. They do not interfere with the formal exercise routine.

Each participant needs to be encouraged to work at their own level, based on target heart rate. Many of the participants get involved in attempting to keep up with the others when they should be concerned with their target heart rate. If they continue to compete, they may exceed their target heart rate, creating a potential explosive situtation. This is not uncommon and is one of the biggest concerns of the program which should be monitored by the instructors.

The program has five major goals:

1. To provide lifestyle improvement for all members of the community age 50 and older.
2. To conduct research on lifestyle improvement activities.
3. To provide continuing education and training programs for those individuals interested in wellness activities
4. To provide testing and prescription in the following areas:
   - body composition
   - pulmonary function
   - cardiac risks
   - cardiovascualr evaluation
   - nutrition
   - flexibility

5. To provide a regime of progressive activity and exercise for people recovering from strokes and heart attacks.

RESULTS

The program has served the community well and at the same time has provided an excellent environment for research and wellness instruction education. As the instructors are generally students of Wayne State College, they learn from the experience of working with the senior participants. The physical education students normally have the opportunity to work only with elementary or high school students. This program gives them exposure to another population which they may enjoy working with. The program also offers a valuable opportuinity for the students studying wellness to apply the skills and information they learn in the classroom.

Research on the relationship of blood pressure and this type of program has been conducted. A marked decrease in the systolic blood pressure was found. However, it is not certain whether this drop is due to physical activity or a new lifestyle, which includes better quality of living and the reduction of stress. Two other studies, dealing with cholesteral and range of motion, are currently being conducted. A study on attitudinal changes would also be beneficial. However, finding a valid and reliable measurement instrument makes this a difficult area to research.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Lifestyle Improvement Program for Seniors can serve as a model program in many communities. However, it is important that when such a program is started, the director be knowledgable in the field of wellness so that the instructors have solid guidance. Because of the intricacy of working with participants who are over 50, it is also important that the director be aware of the safety and liability factors of working with this special group. Instructors need to be able to interact with the participants to ensure that the social needs are met and to increase participation. Instructors also need to be aware of each individual's special needs, particualarly when stroke, cancer or heart attack victims are in the program.

The Wayne State innovative Lifestyle Improvement Program has had a positive effect on senior citizens in the community, the students, both graduate and undergraduate, and on the overall image of the educational institution.

The lives of the participants have been brightened because of this program. Lives have been prolonged and deaths prevented by early detection of potential health problems. The payoff for involvement in a senior wellness program is not only the many physiological gains, but also in the creation of new attitudes, values and goals.